

SENATE—Friday, October 15, 1999

The Senate met at 9:15 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Almighty God, we commit this day to You. By Your grace, You have brought us to the end of another work-week. Yet there is still so much more to do today. There are votes to cast, speeches to give, and loose ends to be tied. In the weekly rush of things, it is so easy to live with "horizontalism," dependent only on our own strength and focused on what others can do for us or with us. Today, we lift our eyes to behold Your glory, our hearts to be filled with Your love, joy, and peace, and our bodies, worn with the demanding schedule of the past week, to be replenished.

Fill the wills of our soul with Your strength and our intellects with fresh inspiration. We know that trying to work for You will wear us out, but allowing You to work through us will keep us fit and vital. Now, here are our minds, enlighten them; here are our souls, empower them; here are our wills, quicken them; here are our bodies, infuse them with energy. You are our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable SPENCER ABRAHAM, a Senator from the State of Michigan, led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEWINE). The Senator from Idaho.

GREETING THE CHAPLAIN

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, let me tell you how comforting it is to have our Chaplain, Lloyd Ogilvie, returning to us in good health and to hear his words and the spiritual guidance he offers the Senate.

We are to happy to have Lloyd Ogilvie back.

SCHEDULE

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, today the Senate will immediately proceed to a

vote on the conference report to accompany the VA-HUD appropriations bill. Following the vote, the Senate will immediately resume debate on the campaign finance reform bill, with further amendments to the bill anticipated. Debate on the campaign finance bill is expected to consume the remainder of the day and will continue throughout the early part of next week. However, Senators who intend to offer amendments are encouraged to work with the bill managers to schedule a time for debate on those amendments as soon as possible.

I thank my colleagues for the attention.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of H.R. 2684, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 2684, an act making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies for the year ending September 30, 2000.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I want to extend my congratulations and thanks to both Senators BOND and MIKULSKI for the conference report they are presenting us today. This bill makes constructive strides toward improving the housing situation for many poor and low income working families.

Though the Chairman and Ranking Member were under extremely tight budgetary constraints, they stood together and worked hard to bring us a conference report which restores important funding. They have presented us with a strong bill that invests in our nation's low income housing stock and continues our efforts to aid struggling communities in their redevelopment efforts.

It is my understanding that this bill moved forward with the support of members from both sides of the aisle. I think that the Chairman and Ranking Member should be commended for this as well. It is notable when legislation receives such even handed, bipartisan support.

Let me highlight a few of the programs that received increased funding in this year's appropriations bill.

It includes 60,000 new section 8 vouchers to be used in our nation's most needy areas. I cannot express how important these new vouchers are to addressing the needs of low income Americans. As the economy soars, so do rents in many metropolitan areas, making it nearly impossible for low income families to afford an apartment. A recent report by the Low Income Housing Coalition shows that in no metropolitan area in this country can a person working at a minimum wage job forty hours a week afford the rent on an average two bedroom apartment.

There are 5.3 million families that HUD classifies as "worst case housing needs." These are families that live in substandard housing or pay more than 50% of their income towards rent. Sixty thousand vouchers will not help all of these families, but they are an important step in the direction of alleviating poverty and will be enthusiastically received by the families that benefit from them.

Also included in this bill is funding for the important mark-to-market plan that will allow HUD to raise section 8 payments to prevent landlords from opting out of the program. In addition, the bill exempts the old preservation deals from restructuring, which saves money and housing. These two provisions are important to preserving affordable housing in our nation's communities.

This bill includes an additional \$50 million to be used for Community Development Block Grants, or CDBG. These funds are used to address the needs of low income neighborhoods in a holistic manner. They have been a resource for renewal and redevelopment in many cities, including Baltimore and other Maryland metropolitan areas, since their creation in 1974. I am extremely pleased to see an increased investment in the hope that CDBG funds can bring needed assistance to many communities across America.

There is also an increase of \$55 million to aid the rehabilitation of disabled elderly housing programs. That includes provisions to provide supportive housing for the elderly, service coordinators in elderly facilities, grants to convert elderly housing into assisted living, and funds for section 8 assistance to be used for assisted living facilities. These levels show that we are committed to our low income senior citizens.

Lastly, I want to highlight the increased commitment to improve the